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## Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports relating to programme  
and administrative oversight and evaluation**

## **Report on policy development and evaluation**

### **Report of the High Commissioner**

#### *Summary*

This report, covering the period from July 2015 through June 2016, is provided pursuant to the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to consider reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation during its annual plenary session (A/AC.96/1003, para. 25. 1. (f) (vi)).

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## I. Introduction

1. UNHCR is committed to ensuring the systematic evaluation and assessment of the Office's policies, programmes, projects, partnerships and practices<sup>1</sup>. Responsibility for these functions resides in the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), working in cooperation with relevant divisions, bureaux and field operations.
2. During the period under review, the Office completed the revision of its evaluation policy, taking into account the updated documents on norms and standards issued by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in June 2016. The development of the policy was accompanied by the parallel creation of a quality assurance system that will guide evaluation work across the organization in accordance with good practices throughout the evaluation management cycle.
3. In line with the overall re-orientation of the evaluation function, PDES focused primarily on evaluating issues of organizational significance, on providing technical support and guidance to decentralized evaluation work and on developing its role in the provision of quality assurance oversight. Through PDES, the Office promoted research on a range of relevant issues and encouraged an active exchange of ideas and analysis between UNHCR and key partners. These activities were undertaken with the purpose of strengthening UNHCR's ability to fulfill its mandate in an effective and efficient manner.

## II. Evaluation policy, capacity and staffing

4. PDES concluded work on the revised evaluation policy, which outlines a forward-looking vision for the function and sets out responsibilities for evaluation across the organization. PDES will focus on organizational level evaluations (including level-3 emergencies<sup>2</sup>), providing technical support and guidance on evaluations to bureaux, divisions and country offices; developing evaluation procedures, methodologies and materials tailored to UNHCR's requirements; and overseeing quality assurance. In view of the need to enlarge evaluation management capacities, PDES foresees a gradual adoption of decentralized evaluation work over the coming five years.
5. During the period under review, and in support of the forthcoming implementation of the revised policy, PDES has invested in the development of a quality assurance system for evaluations within UNHCR. This system will provide key guidance for informing the evaluation management process, from design through completion, and for ensuring conformity with good practices. It consists of five modules addressing the preparation, inception, data collection, reporting and finalization stages of evaluation.
6. To prepare for the introduction of decentralized evaluations, PDES has placed greater emphasis on increasing collaboration with headquarters divisions and the regional bureaux, as well as with field operations. In this regard, the Service initiated a large, multi-country evaluation, in partnership with the Division of International Protection, that is

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluations, reviews and research papers referenced in this document may be accessed at: <http://www.unhcr.org/evaluation-and-research.html> and <http://www.unhcr.org/search?comid=4a1d3b346&cid=49aea93a6a&scid=49aea93a39&tags=evaluation%20report>.

<sup>2</sup> Level-3 emergencies are defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as severe crises that require system-wide mobilization to respond effectively to the scale, complexity and urgency of a situation.

expected to conclude shortly. PDES also worked closely with the Programme Analysis and Support Section in the Division of Programme Support and Management, with a view to integrating evaluation processes into future programming instructions. At the same time, cooperation on the preparation of country programme evaluations with the regional bureaux and field operations has also continued.

7. In line with the commitment in the revised evaluation policy and in order to strengthen the evaluation function, PDES has filled two posts with externally recruited personnel. One staff member, recruited through UNHCR's capacity building initiative, began work in September 2015 and has focused primarily on setting up the quality assurance system. The second staff member will start in September 2016 and will concentrate on supporting decentralized evaluation work through the development of training materials and on convening workshops for field operations – to be implemented in close coordination with the Division of Programme Support and Management.

### **III. Evaluations and reviews**

8. During the reporting period, PDES oversaw a range of evaluations and reviews of policy and programmatic issues related to emergency response, protection and durable solutions, with evaluations and reviews increasingly benefiting from independent external expertise. There has been greater concentration on quality assurance work with respect to the design of the terms of reference for evaluations, the assessment of evidence strength, and the review processes for the draft and final reports. Another notable achievement has been the introduction and follow-up of the management response matrix requiring a formal response to the findings of each evaluation. These measures were introduced to fortify the learning and accountability objectives of the evaluation function.

9. In the context of emergency operations, and in line with its internal commitment to assess UNHCR's response to level-3 emergencies, PDES completed its evaluation of the response for South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda, as well as for Syrian refugees in Turkey. With respect to the South Sudan situation, the evaluation noted a marked improvement in the coordination of the refugee response in Ethiopia compared to previous emergencies, most notably Dollo Addo in 2011. It concluded that the response had been timely and effective in saving lives in both countries and noted the effective role played by the two governments; however, some weaknesses were identified in the use of contingency plans and in preparedness. In Turkey, the evaluation concluded that UNHCR had responded in a flexible manner given the limited operating space and resources available. The evaluation showed that the organization was effective in assisting the Government of Turkey in developing a normative framework to secure protection for Syrian refugees. Major challenges identified included the need to improve knowledge of the refugee population; further scale up the protection response; adapt coordination structures to national, provincial and municipal requirements; and address the challenges of urban refugees.

10. With respect to emergencies generating conflict-related internal displacement, PDES contributed actively to the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (IAHE) assessments of the collective responses to the level-3 emergencies in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, convened under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. As a member of the IAHE Steering Group, PDES was involved at all stages of the evaluation management cycle. During 2016, the Service has been actively engaged in the design of a proposed forthcoming evaluation of operations in Iraq.

11. In line with the revised evaluation policy, PDES has concentrated its resources on evaluation work of organizational significance, on developing approaches to country

programme evaluations and on acquiring expertise in different types of evaluations. The transition to conducting more complex evaluations has required greater initial investment in design and preparation. It has also required the engagement of independent experts and the consequent adoption of procedures that differ from past practices. Strategic-level evaluations are planned on an ongoing basis and have an average duration of 12 months.

12. In the area of protection, the ongoing evaluation of UNHCR's three organizational strategies on child protection, gender-based violence and education is expected to conclude in September 2016. Preparatory research and design work for the evaluation of UNHCR's support to host communities and on protection cluster management has been completed and will be issued for tender shortly. Preparatory work on a number of other organizational level evaluations will commence in the second half of 2016 for implementation in 2017.

13. In the area of country programme and thematic evaluations, PDES completed reports on UNHCR's operations in Colombia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as on the emergency transit centres (ETCs) in Romania and Slovakia. Further evaluations on the quality initiative (asylum procedures) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and on the use of biometric registration in Jordan are being finalized. The Colombia evaluation focused on UNHCR's strategic position in the evolving situation in the country linked to the peace negotiations, on its decision-making processes and on the overall results achieved. It concluded that UNHCR had provided valuable support in developing the national legal framework and public policies to ensure the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and victims of the conflict, and that the organization's community-based approach had been effective in assisting these people. It also observed that there was a need to reduce the number of stand-alone strategies and high-level objectives. In terms of recommendations, the evaluation stressed the need to support additional partners in the implementation of community-based approaches, so as to widen the coverage, to develop a more inclusive approach to durable solutions and to consider a review of staffing and implementation modalities.

14. Notwithstanding UNHCR's long engagement in the Central Asia region, the report noted that durable solutions for refugees in the countries of the region under review (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) remained elusive. It observed that the implementation of some provisions for asylum in domestic laws was still not compliant with international standards and that access to asylum and asylum procedures remained difficult for refugees. On livelihoods, the report noted the challenges in the operating environment and that humanitarian approaches were not well adapted to delivering sustainable self-reliance. Key recommendations included an intensification of efforts to address the precarious legal and economic circumstances of refugees recognized under UNHCR's mandate, to obtain better socio-economic data about refugee households and to adopt more development-oriented approaches through collaboration with experienced partners.

15. An evaluation of the ETCs was conducted in Romania and Slovakia at the request of UNHCR's Resettlement Service and in cooperation with the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Regional Representation for Central Europe based in Budapest. The intended purpose of the ETCs was to enable the emergency evacuation of refugees for potential resettlement to locations where interviews could be conducted safely. The evaluation concluded that the function of the ETCs had changed since their establishment. It observed that the ETCs were valuable for transit resettlement processes but that their operations were determined less by emergency considerations than by the policies and practices of resettlement countries. More specifically, the capacity of the ETCs had not been sufficiently utilized and processing was slower than anticipated. This raised questions about their cost effectiveness. The evaluation recommended a review of the profile of emergency

resettlement referrals, to include priority transfer cases without prior identification of a resettlement country and to introduce minimum standards for the operation of the ETCs.

#### **IV. Research and publications**

16. PDES maintained its support for independent research through the “New issues in refugee research” series. Four papers were published on topics including the role of livelihoods activities in building resilience among refugees in Uganda, the role of the Somali diaspora in UNHCR’s “Global initiative for Somali refugees”, comprehensive solutions for Colombian refugees, and the results of field-based studies on different expenditure and investment practices by refugee and host communities in Uganda. PDES also supported the Regional Bureau for the Americas in a study of the resettlement programmes of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

17. Following field research in Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR and the World Bank, working in close cooperation with their respective country offices, concluded a major analytical study of the poverty and welfare of the Syrian refugee population in these two countries<sup>3</sup>. The study was published by the World Bank and launched in Washington, D.C. in December 2015. The study was also presented at a series of events and seminars focused on the longer-term challenges of addressing refugee displacement in the Middle East, and policy orientations for humanitarian and development agencies in the medium to longer term<sup>4</sup>. PDES has also contributed technical inputs into the design of a World Bank-led study comparing refugee and local households in northern Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Preliminary findings included insight into how Syrian refugees have had an impact on the labour market in Lebanon and the different effects of displacement on refugee, IDP and local households in northern Iraq.

18. PDES supported the implementation of UNHCR’s urban refugee policy during the period under review, including the “Building communities of practice for urban refugees” series of workshops and roundtables that enabled the exchange of local initiatives enabling refugees to integrate into cities. Reports from the events have been published on UNHCR’s website. An interactive website continued to serve as a platform for the “Urban refugee learning programme”<sup>5</sup>, and UNHCR’s partner, URBAN REFUGEES, a non-governmental organization with extensive experience in urban refugee research and evaluation, will administer the website.

#### **V. External relations and inter-agency evaluations**

19. PDES has continued to expand its engagement in external and inter-agency evaluation bodies. It participated in the UNEG Annual General Meeting and Practice Exchange, in the UNEG Working Group, in the Humanitarian Evaluation Interest Group and in the IAHE Steering Group. Active participation in UNEG processes provided opportunities for interaction and learning with UNHCR’s evaluation peers on a range of valuable methodological and technical issues.

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<sup>3</sup> Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23228>.

<sup>4</sup> Available from <http://www.cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/What%20next%20for%20the%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis-%20English.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.urbangoodpractices.org](http://www.urbangoodpractices.org).

20. PDES coordinated the 2015-2016 programme evaluation of UNHCR's engagement with refugees and IDPs in mixed settings led by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). It functioned as the liaison and focal point for all UNHCR internal and external contacts and arrangements. The report, published in April 2016, will be formally presented by OIOS at the 2017 annual session of the Committee for Programme Coordination (CPC) in New York. Additional liaison functions carried out by PDES related to the OIOS biennial report on strengthening the evaluation function across United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes, and the Joint Inspection Unit report, "Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system".

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